

Manifesting Christ in the Local Church

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the church's role in manifesting Christ through authentic living and community engagement.

Duration: 30:06

Scripture: John 14:9, Acts 1:1, Romans 8:29, Ephesians 4:15, 1 Timothy 4:12

Topics: "Church Unity", "Christ Likeness"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of the church being a true expression of the body of Christ, continuing the work that Jesus began on earth. It highlights the need for believers to manifest Christ's character in their daily lives, demonstrating love, humility, and unity. The speaker stresses the significance of living out Christ-likeness in all aspects, not just on Sundays, but throughout the week, and the importance of being part of a church that challenges individuals to grow in their resemblance to Jesus.

Transcript

Way back in 1965, when I had been just converted five or six years, as I read the scriptures, I had a great desire to see a local expression of the body of Jesus Christ, where people around would look and see the spirit of Christ. I understood that the reason why the church is called the body of Christ is because we're supposed to do the same thing that that first body of Christ did on earth for thirty-three and a half years. In Acts 1 verse 1 it says, the first account of Theophilus, this is Luke writing, Acts 1 verse 1, and he's talking about the gospel of Luke.

He says, the first account Theophilus, you remember I wrote to you, was about all that Jesus began to do and teach. Luke's title for his gospel was, All that Jesus began to do and teach. That's his title for the gospel of Luke.

So that is the title inspired by the Holy Spirit for the gospel of Luke. I thought, what is the title for Luke's second book, the Acts of the Apostles? What do you think it should be? All that Jesus continued to do and teach. That was all that Jesus began to do and teach through his physical body, and this is what all that Jesus continued to do and teach through another body that is formed on the day of Pentecost.

So I saw that this is what the church is supposed to do, to carry on, that's why it's called the body of Christ, to carry on demonstrating to the world what the Father was like. Jesus, as I said, explained the Father. So you saw that in John 1 18.

The world never knew that God was a Father. I find I live in a Christian world where 90% of people don't really know God as a Father, born again Christians. If they did, they wouldn't fight with each other.

Husband and wife wouldn't be angry and yelling at each other if they knew God as a Father. The whole problem is this. And the way Jesus lived, you know, he could say in John 14, if you have seen me, Philip, Philip said to him, show us the Father and that's enough for us.

And do you remember what Jesus said? What was it? If you have seen me, you've seen the Father. Now think of that statement, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. And then think of the other statement in John 20, as the Father sent me, so send I you.

Put them together. What's the conclusion you get? You should be able to say to others, if you've seen me, you've seen Jesus. What a challenge.

Jesus said, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. As the Father sent me, I send you. I've got to go out into the world and say, if you've seen me, you've seen Jesus.

Not exactly like he is, but you've seen a little bit of what Jesus is like. Imagine a husband being able to tell his wife that, if you've seen the way I live and talk to you, the way I conduct myself, the way I handle money, you've seen a little bit of what Jesus is like. Or a wife saying to her husband, if you've seen the way I conduct myself, the way I submit, you've seen a little bit of how Jesus submitted to the Father.

It's an awesome challenge. And then going beyond that, when I see I can't do it perfectly myself, God gives me other believers. And together, that as a church, that we can manifest to the world, this is what Jesus is like.

That means my local church, it may be small, it doesn't matter if it's not big, but that we can demonstrate in a small way, that, hey fellas, the world hasn't seen Jesus. He went up to heaven 2,000 years ago, but come and see what he's like. He's in our midst.

It's an awesome challenge. You know, not people just listening to what I say and repeating the same words, but getting revelation from the Lord. So as I said, way back in 65, I was still working in the Navy.

And I wanted to see an expression of the body of Christ. And I remember those days trying to gather some people and saying, okay, let's be an expression of the body of Christ. Just collapsed in a very short while.

It was an Ishmael. And it just died out very quickly. Then I left the Navy.

I always had this burden. It was like carrying a baby in the womb. I carried it for about 10 years before it was born.

Then I came, moved to Bangalore in 72. I said, okay, let's try again. And I gathered a few people and I said, okay, now we're going to build a body.

Just two or three family people. And that also didn't succeed. Because once when I was away somewhere and they met on their own, I asked my wife, what did they talk about when we, when I was not here? And she said, they were just talking about whether we should keep our eyes open or closed when we pray.

I said, wow, how edifying was that? And I knew it's not, it's not going to succeed. And I closed down that meeting. I said, we're not going to meet again.

And I said, Lord, I give up. I produced two Ishmaels. Abraham produced only one.

And I, I give up. It's impossible for me to do it. And I'll never try again.

I'll never try again. I give up, but I have this burden. Maybe somebody else has got to do it, but it's not me.

And then all of a sudden, two, three years later, I don't want to go into the details, but God, in a wonderful way, brought together, you know, in a way that can't be explained. There was a work of his where the beginning of a little, like a small little embryo, something started that grew up. And as I look back, I see that was the fruition of 10 years of a burden in my heart and a lot of miscarriages and Ishmaels.

And finally, there was an expression of the body of Christ. And then as time has gone on, that was 37 years ago. And I realized I was growing old and I'm not going to be around forever.

And I saw Paul had this burden for Timothy saying, Oh, Timothy, remember all that I taught you and remember from whom you learned them. That's the important thing. That it's not just the words, not just the teaching, but Timothy, you saw it demonstrated in my life, the principles by which I lived.

Demas left me and there were different people like Hymenaeus and Philetus who came and rebelled and went away. And many people in Asia left me, but you saw Timothy, how I stuck it out and it didn't matter if people came or went. I stood true to the truth till the end.

I fought a good fight and you've seen that now. You make sure that you, what you have learned, stick true to it and commit it to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. And I saw Paul's tremendous burden that even if he was going moving on, going to be with the Lord, there must be another generation that manifests the same thing.

And he knew it's not an easy task because he had to fight a battle right up to the end. And so many people got upset with him. They found his standard was too high or he was not going to compromise and they would leave him.

And he wanted someone, he didn't find many in one place. He says, I don't have any of my coworkers whom I can entrust this to. There's only one man, Timothy, who will not seek his own.

He'll hundred percent seek the things of Christ. And Timothy, it's not enough that you should be like that. You must train other people, a third generation of people who will train a fourth generation.

So the work of God is ongoing. None of us are indispensable. There's nobody who is absolutely essential for God's work.

When I was a young Christian and we starting building the church, I read a little poem about whenever you think you're indispensable for God's work, he says, carry out this little exercise and put your hand in a bucket of water and then take it out and the hole that's remaining is how much you'll be missed after you're gone. There's no indispensable man. So, but yet there is no indispensable man, but God needs men.

God needs men and women who will stand true to him, irrespective of the cost, who can stand before God and say, God, you know my heart. I do not seek my own in any area. Those are the men and women whom God will use to build the church.

And there are not many. Even among Paul's co-workers, he could find only one. All the others, well, they like the message.

They like Paul's preaching. They like so many wonderful things. But in their heart, they had other ambitions and desires.

Well, God's not going to commit himself to them. So I believe there's a great need for young men and women to rise here and there. And this has been my burden as I've traveled around in different places in India and other places.

So I've just been delighted to hear these three young men share today because I see an expression of the body. They were not just mimicking my words. There was an independent revelation.

That's the thing that excites me. And whenever I see that, it's something like when Simeon picked up the baby Jesus, the body of Christ, he said, wow, or some equivalent words like that. Lord, now your servant can depart in peace because I've seen the body.

And that's the excitement I feel when I see the body of Christ coming up in different places with another generation, in different places. And I want to say God needs that. There needs to be an ongoing testimony for Christ of another generation that has the burden for another generation.

And that's the burden we have in Bangalore as well to see a younger generation coming up to take the baton and run their part of the relay race until Christ comes again. And I want to say to all of you, dear brothers and sisters, that this is part of your responsibility too. People need to see not only Jesus, but Jesus in what he is working in a local situation.

Let me read you a verse in John's gospel chapter 12. In verse nine, it's after the resurrection, not the resurrection, but the raising of Lazarus from the dead. In John 12, verse nine, it says the great multitude of the Jews learned that Jesus was there.

And listen to this. They came, John 12, verse nine, not only for Jesus' sake, but they also wanted to see Lazarus. Who is this guy whom he raised from the dead? So they came to see Jesus and they came to see Lazarus.

It's a unique thing to be raised from the dead. It's so different from the other people. And I believe that's what people need to see.

A church that has conquered spiritual death. And people come to see that. Is it really true? Are there really a group of people who don't fight with each other, who love one another, who don't just go through the ritual of church on Sunday morning, but for whom church is a seven-day affair? I remember people asking me many places, Brother Zach, what's the difference between your church and other churches? And I say, we certainly won't say we are better than other churches.

That's for God to judge. We won't say we don't have any hypocrites in our church. Every church has got hypocrites.

Even Jesus' church had one hypocrite among the twelve. So that's not what we boast about. But we do say, but one difference I would say is this.

For most churches, Sunday is the important day. But not for us. For us, the important day is Monday, and Tuesday, and Wednesday, and Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday afternoon, as after you go away from the church service.

In other words, it's how you live at home, how you behave in your office, how you drive your car on the road in the frustrating circumstances of traffic. That's where your Christianity is tested. How you behave with other people who don't follow the rules, who cut in front of you, etc.

It's not Sunday. It's not how well we sing and praise. That's okay for other churches, not for us.

I said that I would say is the big difference between us and other churches. And so Sunday is okay. It doesn't matter if something went wrong with the music, or the preaching wasn't up to the mark.

It doesn't disturb us if Monday is okay and Tuesday is okay. Sunday is just a little pep talk to help you to go through the week. That's a tremendous difference.

Sunday is not a big thing for us. It's churches seven days a week. Fellowship is all the time, even if we don't meet each other.

It's not just when we come together. We are church. It's not Sunday going to church.

We are church. And I see that is the body of Christ. I mean, Jesus lived the Christ life seven days a week.

He did and he taught. He was always manifesting the Father every day of the week. It wasn't some Sunday wasn't special.

There was no special Sabbath for him. And that is the way we are to live. That every day of the week, anybody can come in, surprise us at home, and find us behaving in a Christlike way to our wives, husbands, and you know, listen through the keyhole and hear that we are behaving in a Christlike way at home all the time.

That is the church we believe in. And that's the church which I believe God wants to see. Which, I mean, like they didn't come just to see Jesus.

They came to see who's this guy who raised from the dead. Is there a church like this? Yes, there is. Not everybody is interested in it because people have an interest in Christ plus many other things.

Whereas Jesus said the first commandment is love God with all your heart. And that means I have no room in my heart for anything outside of Christ. Everything outside of Christ is rubbish.

All of my heart is occupied with Christ. That doesn't mean I'm reading the Bible and on my knees every day. No.

Jesus was making stools and benches and tables for a number of years in the carpenter shop. He was glorifying God there. And you can be working in an office or taking care of babies or anything else.

And that's as holy as any other work. Like I've, you know, in Indian culture, the man is supposed to be like a king. That's traditional non-Christian culture.

And the woman is like a slave who's supposed to do all the work in the house. And when people become Christians, they don't quickly get converted out of that. So I've had to tell people, you know, we got to

understand that we need to help one another.

For example, I said, I take this as an example. If you're sitting having your quiet time in the morning, reading the Bible and trying to understand the meaning of the tabernacle from the book of Hebrews, what does this mean and what does that mean? And your wife is struggling with two or three children, trying to feed them and get them ready for school, etc. And you're sitting there reading the Bible and saying, God speak to me.

And what God is trying to tell you is close your Bible and go and help your wife. But you don't hear that. You say, Lord, what does this tabernacle mean? And what does the altar mean? And we don't hear God because we don't want to hear him.

Christianity is intensely practical. And the best thing at that moment is to close the Bible and go and help your wife. That is the Christianity we believe in, which is practical, where even if you don't understand the tabernacle, we can manifest the spirit of Christ in our relationship, where we are quick to forgive, quick to ask forgiveness, quick to humble ourselves, and quick to serve one another, and not do anything that will make another person feel small in our presence.

It's one of the wonderful things I see about Jesus, that he never made anyone feel small. Everybody was important to him. I mean, a woman caught in adultery, it was very important for him to set her free from condemnation.

And a five times divorced woman in Samaria, who was now sleeping around with a man whom she's not even married to. I mean, most Christians would just despise such a person. But not Jesus.

He had time for her. And he encouraged her. And I say, Lord, I want to be like that.

I want to be sensitive. This is the type of church we want to be like, where drug addicts and prostitutes are welcome to come. Not to remain drug addicts and prostitutes, but that they're loved and cared for.

But we're seeking to build a body where we care and love for one another, but not people who come together just because they feel, oh, this is a nice place to belong to, where we care for one another, and they'll help me if I'm in trouble, and it's a good place to belong to. But where each person has got a living connection with Christ. And therefore, we are together.

You know, just like our fingers. I often use this illustration that the fingers playing a piano or a keyboard work together, not because they're always hanging around with each other. No, it's because they've got a direct connection with the head.

And the head controls them so perfectly that they play so beautifully. And so the unity in the body of Christ is not because we spend a lot of time praying together, or go for frequent picnics, or that would be like the hands work together because they're always holding each other. That's not the reason.

It's because each one of those fingers is connected perfectly to the head. And you have a church where 10 brothers and sisters are perfectly connected, they'll function together perfectly. But if one of them is paralyzed, his connection is gone.

Then it doesn't play properly. There's a discord. That's the problem.

I remember once in one of our church services, two of the instruments were not playing together. And I'm not very good at music, but it disturbed even me. So it must have been pretty bad.

And I remember the Lord saying to me at that time, that does not disturb me. That was something that woke me up. And the Lord said to me, what disturbs me is there a husband and wife here who are not in tune with each other, playing together.

The two brothers here, two sisters here who don't get along with each other, that disturbs me much more than some instruments not playing together. And I prayed a prayer that time and I said, Lord, anything that doesn't disturb you, let it never disturb me again. And anything that disturbs you, let it disturb me no end.

So I changed my perspective. After that, it never bothered me one bit, whether the instruments are out of tune or people were singing out of tune. It didn't make any difference to me.

It disturbed a lot of other people in church service. And if everybody sang wonderfully, that didn't excite me very much either, because I could see that a lot of churches, people who sing so beautifully, there are husbands and wives who are not singing so beautifully at home. And that's what disturbs God so much.

Is God happy with that church where everything is perfect, the music is perfect, the instruments are perfect, and when these folks go home, they're not in tune with each other? What sort of a church is that? That's just a public show. It's like a presentation before an audience. That's not church.

That's not the church that Jesus can boast about to Satan, like he could boast about to Job. Have you seen Job? When the Satan says, I wandered all around the earth, here and there, and God, all these fellows who take your name are a bunch of hypocrites. And God says, yeah, that's right.

But have you seen Job? He's different. And so as the devil walks around the earth, he's still walking around the earth today like he did in Job's time. And he sees so many churches full of strife and conflict and other churches which are just nice window dressing, look so beautiful, and everything looks great.

Music is great. The preaching is great. And the devil says, God, you know what I know.

How these people live seven days a week. You know how some of them are sleeping around with others. But they come here and sing like they're great Christians.

And the Lord says to Satan, that's right. But have you seen that church over there? That may not be so large. They don't sing so well there.

They don't have great musicians there. But have you seen how they live? I want to ask you, my brothers and sisters, are you a part of such a church? Are you a part of a church that Jesus can boast about to Satan? Not perfect, but one that is really seeking to please God. Or are you going to church to just ease your conscience? A church that's got a good reputation in society, in the community that feeds the poor and does a lot of things for others.

I couldn't care less what the community thinks about my church. I'm concerned about what the devil says about my church. The devil's testimony is a million times more important than the testimony of the community.

God's testimony is of course the most important. But next to God, I tell you, is the devil's testimony about my life, about my family life, and my church that's more important than what other people say about it.

What does the devil say about your church? He knows all the things.

What does the devil say about your family life? I want to be in a church that's constantly challenging me to be more Christ-like. Because Romans 8.29 says, the predestination God has determined for our life is Christ-likeness. Those whom he foreknew, he predestined to be conformed to the image of his son.

So the goal that's written on my ticket, predestination, is Christ-likeness. And when I get an airline ticket and I go to the airport, I'm not looking for the biggest plane. No.

I'm looking for the plane. It may be a small little twin-engined, propeller-driven plane, but it's taking me to the destination. That's what you do too.

You don't say, oh there's jumbo jet, I'd like to get into that. But it's not going where you want supposed to go. So I don't want to get into a huge church which is going in some other direction.

I'd rather get into this small little propeller-driven thing, which is small with just a few people in it. But at least it's going to take me to Christ-likeness. I want to be in a church which challenges me every Sunday to be more Christ-like in my behavior, in my thought life, in the way I behave towards my wife, the way I bring up my children, the way I behave in the office.

And if I'm in the right plane, I'll be going closer and closer to my destination if I'm in the right plane. And if I'm in the right church, I'll be getting more and becoming more and more Christ-like in my relationships, in my behavior, in my home, in the office, and everywhere. That's where I want to belong to.

And I want to say to all of you, brothers and sisters, that is where you should belong as well. And God bless you. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this time together. I pray that we'll be able to hear you like Samuel heard your voice, like Mary heard your voice, like the prophets heard your voice, like John heard your voice like a trumpet in the Isle of Patmos, that we shall hear your voice and obey it. I pray in Jesus' name.

I'm sorry we went over time. And the Lord bless you.

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